

FOREIGN POLICY BULLETIN

An analysis of current international events



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1918-1951

FOREIGN POLICY ASSOCIATION • INCORPORATED • 22 EAST 38TH STREET • NEW YORK 16, N. Y.

VOL. XXX No. 22

MARCH 9, 1951

Is Stage Set for East-West Balance at Paris?

As the conference of the foreign ministers' deputies of the Big Four opened in Paris on March 5 Europe, both West and East, was in a state of political uncertainty. France and the Netherlands were without governments, a petition for new elections was circulating in meat-hungry Britain, the Adenauer regime of Western Germany was being pressed for immediate decisions on the Schuman plan by the Western powers, and on German unity by the German Communists and the Kremlin; and the government of Premier Alcide de Gasperi in Italy was threatened by dissension in the ranks of his own Christian Democratic party.

If these developments might seem disheartening to the Atlantic coalition and of good augury to Moscow, the U.S.S.R. for its part, could hardly draw comfort from evidences of mounting dissatisfaction in the countries of Eastern Europe, climaxed by reports of a far-reaching Moscow-directed purge of the Czechoslovak Communist party, by the growing rift in the Communist party of Italy, by the favorable publicity accorded in Europe and the United States to Marshal Tito's efforts at democratization of communism in Yugoslavia, and by the military stalemate in Korea, which has greatly increased the psychological, economic and social problems faced by the Communist government of China.

Thus the Western nations and the U.S.S.R. came to the Paris conference table with a condition of far greater balance between their respective political prospects as well as their military resources than had been true at any time since the end of World War II. Whether or not

this new balancing of opposing forces would bring about the kind of relative stabilization that the nineteenth century great powers achieved after the Congress of Vienna, or would prove the prelude to a worldwide test of arms, only the actual conference negotiations will reveal.

Economics Test Democracy

In the countries of Western Europe the main problem is whether democratic institutions which functioned effectively in an era of relative peace and economic stability can be adapted to the new needs of industrial economies now in process of conversion to what may be protracted rearmament in peacetime—or will have to be supplemented or replaced by institutions representing primarily economic interests. If one excludes from political life avowed Fascists on the one hand and Communists on the other, one finds that in the course of the struggle the middle of the road parties of Western Europe have waged against Fascists and Communists, ideological differences have come to be focused on controversies about the economic structure of society. Where the socialists have not proved sufficiently strong to replace nineteenth-century liberals as a center party, the possibility of creating a workable "vital center" has been gradually whittled down, and a trend has appeared toward conservative-dominated groups, as in France and Italy.

Meanwhile, the Communists, having lost their opportunity to achieve power by parliamentary means in the immediate post-war period, have seen their wartime adherents drift away as the economic situ-

ation improved, as Russia's plans for a dominant role in Europe unfolded, and as nationalist sentiment gained ascendancy over the concept of world communism. For the most part, however, the workers and intellectuals who drifted away from communism have not drifted toward any other existing party. The result of this decline in the strength of the parties of the center and left has been to strengthen the prospects of what are called "Rightist" elements—although some of these groups, responding to the evident desire of rank and file of voters for economic and social improvements often advocate measures which under other circumstances would be described as "Leftist."

Unless the Communists choose this moment for an attempt to seize power by force—the most likely prospect is that they will strip their ranks to the "hard core" of trusted revolutionaries and wait for a more propitious occasion—the tenuous center groups will have to consider the possibility of enlarging their base of operation by including pro-democratic conservatives on the one hand and socialists on the other. A significant development in that direction may be seen in West Germany, where the Social Democrats, already much strengthened by their resistance to rearmament and their victory with respect to "co-determination," stand to make further gains should Germany be unified. For then their ranks would be swelled by the accretion of the Social Democrats of East Germany, notably the staunch anti-Communist group of Berlin led by Mayor Ernst Reuter.

In France the government of Premier René Pleven resigned on February 28

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